



Panhandle Health District

Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Public Health
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Panhandle Health District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Panhandle Health District encourages vaccination and supports CDC guidance amid increase in COVID-19 Delta variant cases

PANHANDLE HEALTH DISTRICT – COVID-19 case counts in PHD’s jurisdiction of Kootenai, Bonner, Boundary, Benewah, and Shoshone counties continue to rise, mirroring both the state and national trends. In late-March and early-April, PHD’s jurisdiction saw some of the lowest levels of COVID-19 since last year. However, during the month of July, case counts, and percent positivity have been steadily increasing each week.

In early July, PHD was averaging 16 COVID-19 cases per day across all five counties. As we move into the second week of August, PHD’s jurisdiction averages 113 cases per day. Since early July, percent positivity has been increasing, and in counties served by PHD, ranges from 5.26 to 23.44 percent. Levels above five-percent typically indicate that not enough testing is happening in a community and there is more virus circulating than is known.

Idaho Bureau of Laboratories (IBL) reports an increase in the Delta variant across Idaho among clinical samples tested. On Friday, PHD received the sequencing results of clinical samples submitted for residents in our jurisdiction. Of those sequenced tests, 86% had the Delta variant.

“We can safely assume that there are much more variant cases circulating in our area that have not been sequenced due to constraints the state faces with available laboratories,” said Don Duffy, Interim Director at PHD. “Information on the Delta variant is concerning - with transmission being possible after only a few seconds of exposure for those non-vaccinated and transmission able to occur when someone is in the pre-symptomatic phase. Unfortunately, these variants will lead many more people to become ill and possibly suffer long-term impacts on their health. Even those vaccinated can contract the Delta variant (unbeknownst to them, as they may not show any symptoms) and then they can become carriers of the virus to those that are unvaccinated. In these circumstances, being vaccinated doesn’t just benefit you – it’s protecting those around you and their loved ones as well.”

PHD currently sits at 38% of those 12 years and older being fully vaccinated, leaving a large portion of the community vulnerable to COVID-19 and its variants. Children under the age of 12 are unable to be vaccinated and will soon be going back to school. Many measures throughout the community that were once in place like plexiglass at checkout stands, limited capacities, masking while indoors and even sanitization have relaxed in many cases or don't exist.

"The longer we wait to receive the vaccine, the greater opportunity we are allowing the virus to mutate into additional, and potentially more deadly, variants that could cause the current vaccine to be less effective," said Duffy.

COVID-19 can also have long-term consequences. Some people are experiencing a range of new or ongoing symptoms that can last weeks or months after first being infected with the virus that causes COVID-19. Unlike some of the other types of post-COVID conditions that only tend to occur in people who have had severe illness, these symptoms can happen to anyone who has had COVID-19, even if the illness was mild, or if they had no initial symptoms.

"Although death from COVID-19 is the worst outcome, we have fellow Americans who may have 'survived' COVID, but are now suffering debilitating symptoms effecting their lives and livelihoods," said Duffy.

Cases, hospitalizations, and deaths in the PHD jurisdiction and Idaho continue to be largely among those who are unvaccinated. According to data from the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, in Idaho since May 15, 2021:

95.5 percent of COVID-19 cases are among those not fully vaccinated
94.7 percent of people hospitalized for COVID-19 were not fully vaccinated
94.2 percent of people who died from COVID-19 were not fully vaccinated

What can you do to protect yourself right now?

Though many have returned to pre-pandemic norms, given the Delta variant's impact and increasing trends, PHD recommends people, regardless of their vaccine status, consider adding back some layers of protection when they are in public settings. Masking, physical distancing, and the COVID-19 vaccine are our best defense, and people are encouraged to use these measures, particularly in environments that are heavily populated, vaccine status is unknown, and when community transmission levels are considered substantial (50 or more cases per 100,000 people over a 7-day period) or high (over 100 cases per 100,000 people over a 7-day period).

As a reminder, PHD provides recommendations to schools and school districts – it does not and cannot mandate or require schools to follow recommendations. The Idaho Department of Education, independent schools, and school boards make final decisions for schools in Idaho.

PHD will continue posting weekly community transmission levels for schools, businesses, and the community to remain aware of the pandemic situation in our area. View community transmission levels by county at: <https://panhandlehealthdistrict.org/covid-19/>. The indicators of

how PHD county risk categories are determined include, regularly monitoring of local hospital capacity and the impact COVID-19 is having on their ability to provide the level of COVID and non-COVID care our communities need, positivity rates, and the 7-day rolling average of cases per county.

If you have questions about COVID-19 in our area, call PHD's COVID-19 hotline 877-415-5225. Hotline hours of operation are Monday -Friday 9am-12pm and 1pm-4pm.

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Panhandle Health District provides over 40 different public health programs to families, individuals and organizations in northern Idaho. From food and drinking water safety to health education and disease control, public health services are critical to ensure our community is a safe and healthy place to live, work and play.

The PHD team is made up of nurses, nutritionists, environmental health specialists, health educators and many other dedicated professionals with a common goal to deliver vital public health services.

Panhandle Health District is one of seven health districts in the state of Idaho.